The "Write" Conditions: How to Overcome Writing for Publication Barriers through Academic Development

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ABSTRACT

Writing for publication is an important measure of individual performance for academics. However, academics in the applied disciplines of social work and the human services often struggle to consistently achieve in this area. Professional development programs that facilitate writing for publication are increasingly common; however, these are often one-off endeavours that focus on early-career researchers. We argue that, where academics have practitioner backgrounds, writing for publication programs that teach writing skills and build supportive, collegial writing communities are vital. In this article we reflect on a writing for publication program for social work academics. Our reflections contribute to further understandings about the barriers academics face in terms of writing and how these might be overcome. Participants in the group identified writing barriers that included time constraints and competing demands; fear and anxiety; and, importantly, a significant disconnection between corporate university agendas and the social justice focus of the discipline. We found that the writing group and the writing retreat increased publication output and the supportive, collegial writing community helped to overcome structural and psychosocial barriers. These reflections point to there being an imperative to provide structured and institutionally legitimised writing for publication programs for social work and human service academics.

Keywords: *Social work; Human services; Writers' groups; Reflection; Academic development; Writing for publication programs*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Australian universities, peer-reviewed publications are an important measure of performance for both individuals and for institutions (Blyth et al., 2010; McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006; Morss & Murray, 2001). However, many academics struggle with low publication rates (McGrail et al., 2006). In the United States, for example, the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute conducted research with approximately 40,000 academic staff and found that 26% of the participants did not spend any time writing and that 27% had not published in a peer-reviewed journal during their careers (Lindholm, Szelenyi, Hurtado, & Korn, 2005). There is also evidence to suggest that there are notably low rates of publication in social work and other applied disciplines (Blyth et al., 2010; Green, 2006).

"The question of how academics learn and advance their academic writing skills has not been fully explored" (Morss & Murray, 2001, p. 36) and there is a significant gap in the literature about the professional development of social work and human service academics. In general, academics report that they need "support and guidance in their path from novice to expert writers" (Galligan et al., 2003, p. 2). We argue that, for academics with practitioner backgrounds, where writing focus has typically been on reports and policy and legislation impact (Heron & Murray, 2004), there is a need for greater support.

At the faculty and discipline level, it is increasingly common for academic leaders to develop initiatives that facilitate writing for publication. Interventions include writing groups (Galligan et al., 2003; Lee & Boud, 2003; Murray & Moore, 2006), writing courses (McGrail et al., 2006; Morss & Murray, 2001; Murray & Moore, 2006), writing coaches and consultations (Baldwin & Chandler, 2002; Murray et al., 2008) and writing retreats (Grant & Knowles, 2000; MacLeod et al., 2012; Moore, 2003; Murray & Newton, 2008).

Green (2006, p. 245) argues that social work is situated in a "precarious place in the academy" due to the applied nature of the discipline and the disconnect between its professional and academic status. Furthermore, some commentators contend that social work has a low status in the academy due to a poor research record and publication output (Blyth et al., 2010; Green, 2006). Heron and Murray (2004) maintain that social work practitioners, unlike some in practice disciplines such as medicine, do not commonly publish in academic journals and that "the vast majority would not consider it appropriate, relevant or useful to publish in scholarly journals" (2004, p. 199). Yet, writing is identified as "a core competence of social work and welfare practice" and is a vital aspect of the professions (Gair, 2012, p. 7) because it determines how the disciplines communicate within the profession and with, and to, those on the periphery.

The issues raised in the literature regarding the intellectual standing of applied disciplines and the reported low publication rates can, we argue, be addressed by structured research and writing development initiatives focused on technical skills of writers and combining strong leadership with collegial, supportive writing communities. In this paper we explore technical, structural and psychosocial barriers to writing. As social work and human service academics, we discuss here a self-study, reflective review on a writing for publication program in which we were involved, at the University of Western Sydney. We originally called our article "Academics Anonymous" because we all shared a collective aim, both during the

term of the writing group and during the process of writing this article: to increase our writing output whilst at the same time supporting ourselves and one another during times of writing blocks and writing despair. As one of our members said one day: "Hi, my name is _____ and I haven't written an article in three years." During our review we grappled with concerns that, with increased writing output will come further individualization and increased competition and we have focused on overcoming these issues and other barriers to writing. This article reports on our reflections on the writing group and writing retreat that were part of the writing for publication program.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: WHY ACADEMICS STRUGGLE IN THEIR WRITING ROLES

The literature highlights a complex array of factors associated with low academic publication rates. We have broken these down into three distinct areas: technical, structural and psychosocial.

Technical barriers to writing for publication

For some academics, a lack of writing and publication know-how prevents them from realizing their writing aspirations. Not all academics know how to write, or at least, they do not know how to write well. Helen Sword's (2012, p. 3) extensive research into the writing styles of several academic disciplines concluded that academic writing is "[i]mpersonal, stodgy, [and] jargon-laden" and that "[t]here is a massive gap between what most readers consider to be good writing and what academics typically produce and publish". Similarly, renowned US writing expert, Peter Elbow (1998, p. 7), says "much writing, most writing – indeed most published writing – is pretty bad".

A number of academics have had minimal writing instruction; much was self-taught during their undergraduate and postgraduate years where the practice of binge writing was habitual and fatigue and anxiety were common. A legacy which has left many with the belief that enormous amounts of uninterrupted time is needed to achieve results (Boice & Jones, 1984). The writing skills needed for publication are often learnt through trial and error and from feedback provided by editors and reviewers of peer-reviewed journals (Galligan et al., 2003). It is little wonder that the dilemma of struggling with under-developed skills combined with an institutional belief that one is capable of writing diverts some academics from the writing path. The problem is compounded when training, support and mentoring are not available. The issue of adequate development for writing is explored further in the section that follows.

Structural barriers to writing for publication

Structural issues are institutional and are connected with both university and publication cultures. Competing demands, challenging workloads and minimal commitment to career development are all indicators that an academic will struggle to write. To be a productive writer, or to become a writer (Grant & Knowles, 2000), academics need a work environment conducive to writing. An academic day requires assiduousness; it is demanding work which typically presents as a scramble of "high priority" student problems, administrative requests and technological processes. Quality writing time has to compete with these busy demands.

The commitment to academic development, in regard to research and writing, within the university is also significant. Clegg (2003) maintains that universities are "ambivalent" about the continuing professional development of academic staff and that most academic development programs exist on the periphery of the academic workload rather than being central to institutional priorities. Positing writing development on the fringes creates problems for academic identity, deepening the rift between teaching and research (Clegg, 2003, p. 38). Furthermore, many interventions target early-career researchers, excluding mid- and advanced-career academics, including those who have come to academia later in their working career after a number of years in the social work and human services professional fields. Interventions are also likely to be one-off or short-term endeavours because it is expected that academics "move beyond the need for funded developmental support" (Lee & Boud, 2003, p. 198). In our experience the practice of focusing on short-term interventions that focus on early-career researchers is also driven by funding restraints.

Psychosocial barriers to writing for publication
Psychosocial factors are significant because they impact upon an individual's commitment to the organisational agenda in regard to writing for publication (Morss & Murray, 2001). We see these factors as occurring on two levels; the first is situated within the workplace and concerns the organisational culture – leadership, the recognition staff receives for their work, and levels of collegiality and trust between colleagues and with management (Ditton, 2009; Fredman & Doughney, 2012). The second concerns the emotional and social needs of the individual, their personal drivers, confidence issues, anxieties and fears, feelings of isolation, momentum, avoidance and disengagement (Grant & Knowles, 2000; McGrail et al., 2006).

A lack of confidence in writing and in negotiating publication processes reduces motivation to write and ties in with feelings of anxiety about the process and the potential outcomes. Journal article publishing is competitive, hierarchical and subject to high rejection rates. The need to publish in journals high on an imposed hierarchy (see Blyth et al., 2010 for a discussion on journal rankings) as well as the privileging of research-based articles (often quantitative in methodology) can act as a disincentive to social work and human service academics who are focusing on the applied aspects of their discipline (Frazer, 2009) and which are often devalued in current publishing environments (Blyth et al., 2010).

Indeed, Australian research shows that academics who are at risk of occupational stress and burnout give up on research as a way of coping (Ditton, 2009). In terms of satisfaction, Australian academics scored second-lowest out of 18 countries in the Changing Academic Profession study (Fredman & Doughney, 2012, p. 2). Therefore, the impact of these psychosocial factors cannot be overstated.

The social work and human services' writing for publication program
The program reported on here was a component of a wider research initiative implemented to support social work and human service staff in cultivating a research and publication culture. The program focused on academic development and included a writing group that met fortnightly for a six-month period during the latter part of 2012 and a three-day, off-campus writing retreat.

The writing group component of the program was run by a facilitator who operated in a staff development role and was available also for manuscript advice and editing. The nine group members included two associate professors and seven lecturers, five of whom were early-career researchers. Each meeting of the group included two components. In the first, members of the group discussed progress on writing projects, both in terms of their personal writing journey and regarding manuscript progress. The second component included writing and publication know-how and skills. Brief workshop sessions included topics such as how to choose a journal, goal setting, time management, abstract writing, article planning and dealing constructively with reviewer feedback. Members teamed up with a "writing buddy" at the beginning of the program. A writing buddy was someone to provide peer support, encouragement and feedback on manuscripts (Murray & Moore, 2006). The workshop sessions were inspired by the work of Morss and Murray (2001), Murray (2005) and Murray and Moore (2006) as well as the facilitators' previous role as the coordinator of a doctoral program.

The writing group meetings were lively, critical and supportive. During workshops members shared ideas and developed plans for research articles. Editor and reviewer feedback was shared, a process that boosted the confidence of some participants to resubmit manuscripts. In some cases members were inspired to finish articles and reports in which they had been lagging behind.

The three-day writing retreat component was held at a small conference facility in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. Nine academics attended the retreat, including six members of the writing group, the facilitator, and two other members of the wider research group (one of whom was completing a PhD thesis). Those participating in the writing retreat met one month prior to the retreat to propose a writing task and to prepare and orientate. For those starting a new writing project the preparation session provided direction in putting together a well-formed summary or abstract of the proposed written piece, a written outline/plan and journal choice (where applicable). Those progressing a manuscript nominated a journal (where applicable) and prepared a written plan.

REFLECTING ON THE WRITING PROGRAM, THE GROUP AND THE RETREAT

We collected and documented our reflections, as follows. Firstly, the facilitator distributed questionnaires to members of the writing group and evaluations of the writing retreat with the aim of conducting a review. All members of both the writing group and the retreat were provided with an opportunity to participate in this process.

To ensure that the process was ethical and that participation in the review was consensual and informed we sought ethical clearance from the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee and distributed consent forms to group members who volunteered to contribute. These were collected separately so that respondents' comments could remain confidential. The questionnaires and evaluations were designed to assess the degree to which the writing for publication program was successful for participants and sought to provide understanding about the barriers academics face when writing for publication and how they seek to over-come these barriers. Questionnaires consisted of close-ended questions and short-answer,

open-ended questions designed to allow some latitude to respondents in expressing themselves. Evaluations consisted of open-ended questions.

The second phase took the form of a reflective self-study and focused on "inclusive participation within a mutually beneficial project where deep interpretive processes occur[red] and members co-construct[ed] knowledge" (Bridges & McGee, 2011, p. 213). Four members of the program accepted the facilitator's invitation to participate in this phase and engaged in writing narratives about their experiences of the program. This approach to the study was drawn from self-study methodology:

…in the social sciences we study ourselves in relation to others and we seek to gain understanding in order to move ideas forward in specific settings … When we label the work we do as self-study, we do so because in the collection of data and the presentation of the work, we make the relationship of self to the other a central part of the focus of the work.
(Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. v)

Self-study is an approach that allows participants to document what they have learnt about professional practice and the personal practical knowledge they possess that contributes to knowledge and understanding of this practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). The quote above refers to self-study in US teaching settings where heightened interest in situating educators *inside* the experience of practice emerged at a time when questions were being asked about taken-for-granted assumptions about methodology, practice, ownership and claims of knowledge. However, the use of self-study approaches extends beyond US teaching contexts. It has been used in Australia as part of a review of the Australian National University's library processes (see, for example, Wood, 1982) and, more recently, in UK hospital settings (see, for example, Littlewood et al., 2013).

Hamilton and Pinnegar (2013) argue that there have been few studies that explore the ways in which collaboration is not only fundamental to the understanding but also gives shape and form to the discussion that emerges. This was an important component of our reflections on this program and provided the opportunity for us to reflect in more depth and further analyse our experiences.

Participants wrote a two-page narrative of their experiences of the writers' group and the writers' retreat. This occurred several months after the program had been completed, providing space to reflect on experience and writing outputs. Once completed, narratives were circulated among the group for discussion and further reflection. This process was repeated up to three times, so that three participants reflected on each narrative. Reflective analysis resulted in the emergence of thematic categories (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1990). Narratives were then returned to the facilitator who collated the themes; these were again circulated to the participants for a deeper level of analysis.

REFLECTING ON NARRATIVES AND THEMES

The group involved in writing the narratives also reflected on the questionnaires and evaluations that had been completed by writing group participants and writing retreat

attendees. We coded each type of document that collected reflections carefully for transparency. We used the code "Q" for questionnaire, "WR" for the writing retreat evaluation and "N" for participants' written narratives. A numerical value was assigned to each respondent.

We applied a thematic analysis to data from questionnaires (*n*=7), writing retreat evaluations (*n*=7) and narratives (*n*=5). Four broad themes were identified:

1. Barriers to Writing

2. Overcoming barriers to writing

3. Structure and leadership

4. The important role of writing retreats for academic development

We also considered the role of the writing for publication program in terms of increases in writing output. The questionnaires asked respondents if their publication output had increased as a *direct result* of the writing group. Whilst these are self-reported ratings, they are positive and show how participation motivated group members with several respondents reporting an increase in productivity over the six-month period. During the period of the writing for publication program two members submitted an article for publication, two completed book chapters and four converted conference papers into journal articles. One member resubmitted an article that had been accepted subject to rewriting; this was significant as the member completed the resubmit based on encouragement and support from the group. As well as the achievements listed above, five additional articles were set in motion during the period of the program.

Barriers to writing

The questionnaires asked respondents to identify the main barriers they faced in terms of writing. They were given the following prompts: *time constraints; competing demands; lack of motivation; lack of confidence; other.* All seven respondents nominated both *time pressures* and *competing demands* as being the main factors presenting barriers to writing. Only two said that *lack of confidence* was a factor, and one identified *family responsibilities* as a barrier. The narratives identified *fear and anxiety* and *a disconnect with internal and external drivers* as being the main barriers to writing.

Time constraints and competing demands

In an environment of increasing administrative responsibilities and burgeoning teaching loads, time constraints and competing demands are a reality that can be difficult to negotiate. The process of securing grants, conducting research, writing up and securing journal publication can take years to come to fruition. This can be disheartening when an article may be rejected (Galligan et al., 2003). But it is particularly difficult for the social work and human services academic who engages in research that "involves liaising with members of marginalized groups ... Ethics applications involving 'vulnerable subjects' ... advisory boards, steering

committees and community consultations … [and a] preparedness to 'give back to the community'" (Frazer, 2009, p. 90) all of which add to the time and effort required.

Whilst all seven respondents to the questionnaires nominated both *time pressures* and *competing demands* as being barriers to writing, the narratives highlighted the need to make writing a priority in the context of limited time resources. The respondent below conceptualizes time barriers in terms of avoidance rather than a lack of time:

I had finished a frantic semester of teaching and had not found time to do any writing. Although if I am honest, "no time" was an excuse for avoiding something I didn't enjoy, wasn't a priority and something that was well and truly in the "too hard basket." (N.4)

The respondent below experiences time as a barrier but also emphasizes a desire to learn strategies to include writing in a busy schedule:

We reminded each other to [be] vigilant about taking time in our week to write, to honour ourselves and provide spaces for writing. We listened to solutions … ways to "make" time, ways to find spaces that were compatible with writing, things like writing for an hour every morning, or writing in between classes, solutions like not turning on email first thing in the morning. (N.5)

Whilst the literature acknowledges that competing demands and time constraints are a barrier to writing it is also conceded that some academics *do* fit writing into their workloads (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray et al., 2012; Murray, 2013). The respondent above, like several in our writing group, actively sought strategies to create more time to write.

Fears and anxiety

Lee and Boud (2003, p. 190) identified "scholarly writing as a key site for the generation of fear and anxiety". These can be brought on by institutional pressures, the competitive environment of academic publishing, perceptions of judgement from within the academy or more personal responses to do with self-esteem and confidence.

Respondents raised issues such as feeling paralyzed, being unable to start writing or complete reports or articles. They wrote about feeling isolated and alone in the struggle to write. One had internalized her inability to progress writing tasks as a personal "deficit" (N.1). This focus on being "unable", or "not good enough", led to "procrastination, feeling blocked or empty of ideas" (N.5) for another. The transition from PhD student to full-time academic brought about anxiety for the respondent below, an early-career researcher, which resulted in procrastination and writer's block:

I'd had my PhD for a couple of years and, despite having three articles in draft form, I had yet to publish. I'd gone from a confident writer to one that did everything to avoid writing. (N.1)

We have found that these painful feelings about writing; fear, anxiety, failures in confidence, poor self-esteem and so on are also experienced by mid- and advanced-career academics. The respondent below, a mid-career academic, describes their writing as a "painful mess" and talks about using his time in the group to avoid doing it:

We talk about [colleague's] ideas for a paper … It is not only good it is better than talking about the painful mess that is my writing and the longer I can enthuse and encourage, the more I can avoid my inability to deal with that mess. (N.2)

There are also links between paralyzing emotions and organisational environments that encourage individualism and competition. The corporatisation of university education has established conditions where performance measures are linked to competition, bringing about failures in collegiality and difficulties in establishing satisfying collaborations (Fredman & Doughney, 2012).

N.1, who talked earlier about the lack of confidence experienced because she had yet to publish had, like many social work academics, come to academia later in their working career. N.1 felt anxious and paralyzed by the perceived competition from younger colleagues who had a more established academic background:

Feeling like I was too old and tired to keep up with the raft of new (and younger) PhD graduates/colleagues … (N.1)

Yet the trajectory that renders N.1 anxious is typical of the career pathway of social work academics who are "expected to have spent some time in practice and to have acquired academic as well as professional qualifications, rather than having pursued a pure, linear, academic trajectory from the beginning" (Green, 2006, p. 248).

A disconnect with internal and external drivers

Webster (2013, p. 11) argues that, in disciplines such as social work, learning, research and "interactions with service users are all informed by collectivist values". Some of the group members struggled to find meaning in writing for publication when they felt that the positioning of those publications was orientated toward neoliberal outcomes and excluded service users. For one social work academic it was difficult to see how writing for publication would advance the social change agenda:

I often wonder about the difference a journal article will make to the people who are the focus of my research. (N.4)

However, another felt that their publications could contribute to social change and social justice and include service users:

As we all know, "publish or perish" is about our survival as academics and although the … accolades and personal achievements are important, of greater importance to me is the contribution my research grants and publications make … much of my research is in partnership with organizations with a strong social justice mission. (N.3)

Performance measurements placed on academics in terms of publishing in "gold standard" journals (those with a high "Journal Impact Factor" based on the Thomson Reuters system, see Blyth et al., 2010) position external drivers as the main priority when publishing. Both social work and the human services are applied disciplines with much of the theory

underpinning them "derived from other disciplines" (Blyth et al., 2010, p. 124). Therefore, they are likely to publish in journals outside of those considered to be core journals in their discipline. This exacerbates two problems for academics in these disciplines. Firstly, it contributes to the low academic standing of the discipline because academics publish in journals outside of the journals they gain credit for publishing in, thereby ignoring the value and impact of these vital publications. And secondly, significant contributions to the community and government through reports for organisations and activities that influence policy and legislation as well as the lives of individuals go ignored.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO WRITING

Being a part of a supportive, collegial writing community

All of the respondents to the questionnaires indicated that collegiality was an important outcome of the writing group; six out of seven said that being part of a supportive and collegial writing group motivated them to write; five said that being part of a writing community was an important outcome and that mutual support was an important element of the group. All of the narratives spoke of the importance of being part of a supportive and collegial environment.

Writing groups and retreats provide a range of professional supports. Evaluations of writing groups have shown that they provide technical know-how and skills, as well as providing institutional support through the opportunity to engage in formalized groups that are endorsed by the university (McGrail et al., 2006). Writing groups also fulfill psychosocial needs. Members of our program consistently said that encouragement from others (so commonly found in groups of this kind), helped to overcome confidence issues, dispel fears and anxiety, inspire, and to motivate. Research into writing groups has found that increased collegiality within a group can engender a sense of belonging (McGrail et al., 2006) and re-envision writing as a social act (Lee & Boud, 2003), "in which we see ourselves as a member of a community of writers" (Grant & Knowles, 2000, 11).

This [a sense of being part of a community of writers] was the best part of the group for me, connecting better with my colleagues' research interests helped me feel more of a sense of belonging to our work group. (Q.6)

It was the experience of being part of the writing group that made the group member below aware of their identity as a writer. The group was an affirmation of identity and part of making that identity visible:

The writing group has helped me to see myself as a writer. It has made my role of writer more perceivable in my own mind. (N.5)

Furthermore, one respondent said that the writing group supported the discipline groups by establishing an identity as a research group:

[The group] helped us establish certainly, I think, through an identity around ourselves as a research group. (Q.6)

Because writing groups "provide an avenue where people can share their difficulties in an accepting and non-threatening environment" (Galligan et al., 2003, p. 32), they can be a critical tool in improving organisational culture *and* the professional experience of the individual. For one member, the opportunity to talk about their writing was like a "coming out" (N.4). For others, the interaction with the group was vital in gaining support and developing collegial relationships:

I felt connected in a safe place where, for a short while, I could tell and process the truth about my writing … People help. They really help … On reflection the group helped me to stay afloat. (N.2)

It was a profound experience where I forged many collegial professional friendships that felt as though they were built on a frank honesty, humor and a desire to collectively achieve something. (N.5)

For the respondent below, the group helped with issues perceived as the neoliberal agenda that has entered universities:

My colleagues are decent people – that is, they practise decency. Our intuition is that collectivity is a defense against rampant individualism and reductionist discourses on higher education and "productivity" … What worked about it for me was just that. (N.2)

Combining a supportive collegial environment with writing skills strategies

There are assumptions in the academy that academics are cognizant of the discipline of writing and publication procedures. These assumptions have implications: one being that academics are left to write in isolation. Members of our group reflected on the need for academic development to enhance their writing skills *in combination with* the opportunities to develop strategies to overcome structural barriers and psychosocial issues. Whilst the measure of success of writing for publication programs is an increase in publication rates (McGrail et al., 2006), a writing group as an academic development intervention can have more significant effects. Morss and Murray (2001, p. 36) argue that writing groups can be influential precisely because they provide "support and development, and not just more time". As the respondents below say, the writing group worked because it *combined* the learning of technical skills with psychosocial needs:

… Revealing our problems with writing … and learning about writing techniques was what brought the group together into a community of writers. (N.5)

… The possibility of a collegiate supportive group with the clear aim of increasing our publication … and to be able to support and comment on the work of my colleagues [was] an added bonus. (N.3)

The literature is wholly positive about the capability of writing groups to influence and develop the writing skills of academics and positively influence writing behaviours, as well as fostering writing communities (Lee & Boud, 2003; Murray & Newton, 2009). The inclusion of peer support through "the writing buddy" (Lee & Boud, 2003; Morss & Murray, 2001) was an important learning tool in the group that also fulfilled psychosocial

needs. This buddy system is designed to provide each member of the group with a support person who they can write with, air problems with and offer advice on manuscripts (Morss & Murray, 2001).

The writers group taught me about the structure and style of abstracts, how to select a journal and making time for writing. I also drew great strength from having a writing buddy. (N.4)

We are committed to output, to FOR codes and to "the group" and we … commit to our "buddies" as an act of solidarity. (N.2)

The combination of support and positively addressing barriers, so that these can be overcome, is significant here. Support alone, as one of the members highlighted, is problematic because it can justify what we don't do (N.2).

STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Morss and Murray (2001, p. 48) argue that "what stops people from writing is not lack of skill but lack of framework, a framework that puts writing for publication in real time and space". Indeed, we found that a formalised, legitimate structure through regular meetings and clear deadlines supported goal orientation. The respondent below found opportunities within the structure to be mentored and to form valuable connections:

The writing group brought us together as a group around our research and writing goals and enabled connections to form we hadn't previously identified … [role modeling of well published colleagues and opportunities to find out about their strategies]; it widened the resources available to each of us through group connections … each fortnight we re-dedicated ourselves and our goals. (Q.6)

The majority of program members identified leadership and the role of the facilitator in structuring and guiding the group as very important to their personal writing successes. In particular, they specifically identified the facilitator teaching them skills as important to their development; the support and encouragement of the facilitator as helping to create a collegial community; and the structure as being significant in supporting members to focus on writing:

It was at the first writer's group that [the facilitator] informed me that "major revisions" was not a rejection! (N.4)

 [The facilitator] was completely committed to getting the group to work. [Her] input was a chief reason for the group's effectiveness. (Q.6)

Unfortunately, when the funding for the group came to an end some members felt that the loss of structure and leadership had a negative effect on their productivity:

I found the writing group very productive and inspiring. Unfortunately, I didn't sustain the motivation, enthusiasm or the level of productivity around writing journal articles after [the facilitator] left. (N.3)

Writing retreats

The literature reports positive professional effects regarding academic staff retreating from the routine distractions of telephone calls, emails, office visits, and meetings that commonly occur in their professional lives (Grant & Knowles, 2000; Moore, 2003; Murray & Moore, 2006). Retreats can provide an opportunity to re-focus and gain momentum in an environment that is exclusively and legitimately for writing (Murray & Moore, 2006). The writing retreat emerged as an important theme from all aspects of the review. As one retreat participant said, "it felt very much like what I thought working as a reflective educator in tertiary education would always be". (WR.5)

Being a captive audience to the requirement – and desire – to write, in the company of others who were doing the same, was very supportive and motivating. (WR.7)

This structure was ideal for me. Working in a room with others was not a pressure cooker situation; and it was far from the self-surveilling (think of the Foucauldian idea based on Bentham's prison model). Rather, the energy in the room was positive and infectious. (N.1)

Grant and Knowles (2000, p. 7) maintain that retreats provide the literal place and time to write but also offer the "metaphorical sense of making imaginative spaces to occupy as writers". To be sure, the physical environments of retreat centres lend themselves to practices that cannot be achieved on campus, such as providing *extended* individual private spaces, facilitated guidance, and opportunities for immediate feedback on writing. These practices increase an individual's knowledge of themselves as a writer, improve writing skills, and build confidence. As well as this, retreats introduce the writer to the idea that writing can be a social and interactive act. "People writing as part of a community of writers are more likely to learn faster ... support each other ... [and] demystify the process of writing by sharing each other's successes and failures" (Moore, 2003, p. 334). The participants of the retreat overwhelmingly reported that the collegiality of working in the group was beneficial:

This was surprising as I had envisaged going away and working in a quiet place on my own but having the opportunity for all being in [the] same room … was extremely valuable. (WR.4)

We found a link between planning for the retreat and then committing to the time to write with the role of momentum:

I actually felt that planning for the retreat was almost as useful as the retreat itself … I needed to prepare to use it productively. (WR.1)

For some, the results were immediately apparent and occurred on site:

Skeleton final chapter developed … the process worked well for me. (WR.5)

I finished the textbook contribution and sent it off the next day – now accepted for publication. (WR.7)

I'm very happy with what I achieved. I've written 5200 words of a 6000 word article and have a clear sense of exactly what needs to be done to complete it. (WR.1)

For others, the impact of the retreat was ongoing and the momentum gained on the retreat produced results some time afterward. This is a valuable finding regarding the importance of creating momentum:

The results? Well, six months later I submitted my article ... a sole authored piece ... several months later, it was published. The writer's retreat had an impact that lasted for some months afterwards in terms of confidence, not only in writing but in myself. (N.1)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

All of the social work and human service academics in this group identified barriers to writing that considerably affected their success in writing for publication. A noteworthy theme in our reflections was that academics who are focused on writing and have a desire to see their research through to publication are eager to learn strategies and develop communities to enable them to overcome these barriers.

It is notable that, through our reflections, we came to see that there are significant issues for mid- and advanced-career academics, as well as for early-career academics. This group experienced fear of failure and self-doubt in relation to writing whereas the literature has, to date, focused solely on PhD students and early-career researchers as struggling with these issues.

We also found that that individualism and competition in the academy are particularly difficult for social work and human service academics because these professions are collectivist in nature (Webster, 2013). Indeed, one of the most consequential conclusions from this review is the need for structured and legitimised (funded) writing for publication programs within the social work and human service disciplines to create and foster supportive and collegial writing communities. The literature, as well as our own experience of the writing for publication program, demonstrates that these interventions increase publication output. But more importantly, such initiatives fulfill psychosocial needs that overcome barriers to writing.

As Murray (2013) suggests, it is vital that the academy supports academics to write and that they provide institutional support in the form of time and funding. Murray contends "writing is not a hobby" and it is as much the institution's responsibility to develop writers as it is for the academic to write.

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